

In the Claims:

1. (Previously Presented) A bulky sheet material having three-dimensional protrusions comprising a first layer and a second layer adjacent to the first layer, said first layer and said second layer being partly joined together at joints in a prescribed pattern, said first layer having a number of said protrusions which are located between said joints, said second layer comprising a material which exhibits elastomeric behavior, and said bulky sheet material exhibiting elastomeric behavior as a whole and breathability and has a recovery of 60% or more from 50% extension, and

wherein said second layer comprises a web formed by carding comprising latent crimping fibers having a helical shape which are made of a thermoplastic polymer having an eccentric core-sheath or side-by-side configuration and comprising two thermoplastic polymers different in shrinkage and exhibit both thermal shrinkability and elastomeric behavior, and said first layer comprises a fiber aggregate comprising fibers which are made of a thermoplastic polymer and have substantially no thermal shrinkability or do not shrink at or below the thermal

shrinkage temperature of said fibers exhibiting thermal shrinkability,

said three-dimensional protrusions comprised of fiber-filled protrusions, and

said sheet material having been heat-treated at or above a temperature at which thermal shrinkage of the fibers constituting the second layer is initiated, whereby said second layer shrinks to form said protrusions in said first layer.

2. (Original) The bulky sheet material according to claim 1, which has a basis weight of 20 to 200 g/m², an apparent density of 5 to 50 kg/m³ under a pressure of 0.4 cN/cm², and an apparent density of 20 to 130 kg/m³ under a pressure of 34.2 cN/cm².

3-5. (Cancelled)

6. (Original) The bulky sheet material according to claim 1, wherein at least one of said first layer and said second layer has a large number of perforations.

7. (Previously Presented) An absorbent article comprised of a liquid-permable topsheet, a liquid-impermeable backsheet and an absorbent member interposed between said topsheet and said backsheet, wherein at least one of said topsheet, backsheet or absorbent member of said absorbent article is comprised of a bulky sheet material having three-dimensional protrusions comprising a first layer and a second layer adjacent to the first layer, said first layer and said second layer being partly joined together at joints in a prescribed pattern, said first layer having a number of said protrusions which are located between said joints, said second layer comprising a material which exhibits elastomeric behavior, and said bulky sheet material exhibiting elastomeric behavior as a whole and breathability and has a recovery of 60% or more from 50% extension, and

wherein said second layer comprises a web formed by carding comprising latent crimping fibers having a helical crimp which are made of a thermoplastic polymer having an eccentric core/sheath or side-by-side configuration and comprising two thermoplastic polymers different in shrinkage and exhibit both thermal shrinkability and elastomeric behavior, and said first layer comprises a fiber aggregate comprising fibers which are

made of a thermoplastic polymer and have substantially no thermal shrinkability or do not shrink at or below the thermal shrinkage temperature of said fibers exhibiting thermal shrinkability,

said three-dimensional protrusions comprised of fiber-filled protrusions, and

said sheet material having been heat-treated at or above a temperature at which thermal shrinkage of the fibers constituting the second layer is initiated, whereby said second layer shrinks to form said protrusions in said first layer.

8-9. (Cancelled)

10. (Previously Presented) The bulky sheet material of claim 1, wherein said fiber aggregate of said first layer is selected from the group consisting of a carded web, a nonwoven fabric, and a knitted fabric.

11. (Previously Presented) An absorbent article comprised of a liquid-permable topsheet, a liquid-impermeable backsheet and an absorbent member interposed between said topsheet and said backsheet, wherein at least one of said topsheet, backsheet

or absorbent member is comprised of said bulky sheet material of claim 1.

12. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article of claim 11, wherein at least one of said topsheet or backsheet is comprised of said bulky sheet material.

13. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article of claim 7, wherein at least said topsheet is comprised of said bulky sheet material.

14-16. (Cancelled)

17. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article of claim 7, wherein said fiber aggregate of said first layer is selected from the group consisting of a carded web, a nonwoven fabric, and a knitted fabric.

18. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article of claim 7, wherein said article is a sanitary napkin.

19. (Previously Presented) The bulky sheet material according to claim 1, wherein said sheet material has a breathability in terms of Gurley air permeability of 0.6 sec/100 ml or less as measured in accordance with JIS P8117.

20. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article according to claim 7, wherein said bulky sheet material has a breathability in terms of Gurley air permeability of 0.6 sec/100 ml or less as measured in accordance with JIS P8117.

21. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article according to claim 7, wherein said bulky sheet material has a basis weight of 20 to 200 g/m², an apparent density of 5 to 50 kg/m³ under a pressure of 0.4 cN/cm², and an apparent density of 20 to 130 kg/m³ under a pressure of 34.2 cN/cm².

22-23. (Cancelled)

24. (Previously Presented) The absorbent article according to claim 7, wherein at least one of said first layer and said second layer has a large number of perforations.

25-27. (Cancelled)

28. (New) The bulky sheet material according to claim 1, wherein the ratio T/T' of the thickness T of the bulky sheet material measured at the protrusions to the thickness T' of the bulky sheet material measured at the joints is at least 2, wherein the thickness T is measured under a pressure of 0.4cN/cm^2 , and the thickness T' is measured under a pressure of 10 to 40 N/cm^2 applied to the joint, and wherein the thickness T ranges from 1.5 to 10 mm measured under a pressure of 0.4 cN/cm^2 .

29. (New) The bulky sheet material according to claim 28, wherein the ratio T/T' ranges from 2 to 6.

30. (New) The absorbent article according to claim 7, wherein the ratio T/T' of the thickness T of the bulky sheet material measured at the protrusions to the thickness T' of the bulky sheet material measured at the joints is at least 2, wherein the thickness T is measured under a pressure of 0.4cN/cm^2 , and the thickness T' is measured under a pressure of 10 to 40 N/cm^2 applied to the joint, and wherein the thickness T ranges from 1.5 to 10 mm measured under a pressure of 0.4 cN/cm^2 .

31. (New) The absorbent article according to claim 30, wherein the ratio T/T' ranges from 2 to 6.

32. (New) The absorbent article according to claim 11, wherein the ratio T/T' of the thickness T of the bulky sheet material measured at the protrusions to the thickness T' of the bulky sheet material measured at the joints is at least 2, wherein the thickness T is measured under a pressure of 0.4cN/cm^2 , and the thickness T' is measured under a pressure of 10 to 40 N/cm^2 applied to the joint, and wherein the thickness T ranges from 1.5 to 10 mm measured under a pressure of 0.4 cN/cm^2 .

33. (New) The absorbent article according to claim 32, wherein the ratio T/T' ranges from 2 to 6.